

RE-CONCILIATION

THE HIDDEN HYPHEN



by MARY MORRISON

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About the Author/Teacher of the Gospels course at Pendle Hill since 1957, and since 1946 a member of Trinity Parish, Swarthmore, Mary Morrison describes herself as forty-nine per cent Quaker and fifty-one per cent Episcopalian. Born in New Hampshire and educated at Smith College, she now lives in Swarthmore with her husband, Maxey.

A Contributing Editor of *The Episcopalian*, Mary Morrison has written many articles and one book, *Jesus: Man and Master*, published in 1968. An earlier number in our series is her *William Law: Selections on the Interior Life*.

The present pamphlet has been a long time growing. It first appeared as a 200-word journal entry in 1951. It became, in 1970, half of a public dialogue with Martha Moscrip of *The Episcopalian* at the Denbigh Conference Center. In 1973 it developed still more for the Spring Conference of the Companions of the Holy Cross, as part of a four-way public conversation with Margaret Sheets and Anna Wright, Companions, and Jim Squire, the Conference chaplain. This pamphlet, at least for the moment, is its final form. Much of the content, and its spirit throughout, have grown from many hours spent with these four people.

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OUR COVER: Detail from *Paradise*, 15th century Sieneese painting by Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia (1402-1482). Tempera on canvas transferred from wood, 18½ x 16". Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

RECONCILIATION is an easy word to say, smooth and flowing, speaking itself almost as gracefully as a dance. Why, then, when we try to live out the word, do we often—perhaps usually—find it moving in quite a different way, more like a karate match than a dance?

The word is a much sharper one than it seems, for there is a hyphen hidden away in it. Re-conciliation. The “conciliation” part of the word is a cousin to the word “council” and carries the sense of “together.” The “re-” part, however, implies a break. Gathering together has to be done *again* in the face of some kind of break, some kind of relationship-disaster. A wound has already been given and taken somewhere, somehow, even though we may not know exactly where or what it is—the first karate-chop, perhaps.

Re-conciliation: with the emergence of that hidden hyphen the word no longer flows smoothly. It is a razor’s edge, painful, dangerous, cutting; a narrow ridge along which we walk, dizzied by the headlong fallaway of the land to both sides of us; a tightrope on which we desperately balance—all uncomfortable images and all true.

They are true because they describe our time and our state, in which, perhaps more than ever before, we see a break in our relationships wherever we look—with the earth, with society, with our tradition, with our brothers and sisters, with our children, with ourselves. It is an excruciatingly uncomfortable time, in which, if we stop and think, we see ourselves to be living right on top of that invisible hyphen, on the razor’s edge in the middle of separation.

Nothing could feel less like what we think of as a reconciling time. Yet perhaps it is exactly that; and what is more, it may have a good claim to be the only kind of time that *is* reconciling.

To explain what I mean, let me draw a mental picture:

A man is walking away, down a long road,
while behind him someone is calling, calling.
Will he turn?
Sometimes we are the ones calling—
or think we are.
But always, underneath that,
we are the ones being called
by the facts
by life
by God.

Will we turn?

Perhaps this hyphen-time in which we live is a good time, the best of all, because those voices calling after us can be heard. There have been other, more muted times when the calling voices were silent or very faint, to be heard only by very sharp ears, and the rest of us with only normal hearing could walk steadily on toward our own little enclaves of happiness, holiness even, with no feeling that we should listen or turn back. We ourselves have lived in such a muted time until very recently.

Those Paradises that we used to walk toward are so many! And so hard to leave! The good old days of simple values and clear-cut virtues. The ease and freedom of middle-class suburban life. The pleasures of the mind. The pleasures of goodness, even—has anyone ever stopped to count up what sacrifices it may require of others that *he* should be good?

There is also the Paradise of what one might call the Pax Europa, the sheltered state (for those of us who live in the middle of it) of the former British Empire. Those of us who have grown up either in it or living on its harvest of power and riches are myopic to a point where we see the quiet time now past as a norm and wonder what has happened to it.

But in the long run Jesus is only stating the facts when he

says, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines" (Mark 13:8). When we are able to disregard and disbelieve his description, it is only because of our great leftover structure of riches and power. Our Paradises are really Fools' Paradises.

If the prophet Jeremiah were around today, he would be asking us, "Why do you leave the foundation of living water and hew out cisterns for yourselves?" Well, we know why. It's easy, it's pleasant, it can even be beautiful. But now many voices are shouting at us that in the long run our cisterns won't really hold water. And we must turn, and take our fingers out of our ears and listen, standing here on the razor's edge of that hyphen that marks our separation.

The earth—we have separated ourselves from her by our comfort, luxury, ease. We have freed ourselves from the burden laid upon Adam, "in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." (Genesis 4:19) We no longer have to move at our own speed, or carry our own burdens, or do our own work. We may as a result feel like those lilies of the field that Jesus talks about—but we aren't. We have no roots, we have only that heavy trampling walk, and our style of life is making the earth groan under our feet.

For we have consumption.

Maybe we never thought of it as a disease before; but Jesus did. "You lack one thing," he told a rich man. "Go, sell what you have . . . and come, follow me" (Mark 10:21). In his teaching riches and power are always presented as hindrances to the Kingdom of God.

And what's the Kingdom?

Maybe it is all of us, the whole "human running race," as Corita Kent calls it, working together on finding out what man's place on this earth really is—finding our own place of freedom in its workings as the birds have theirs, the lilies theirs.

During his wanderings Jesus made a poetic and sad statement: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). It was true specifically of Jesus. It is true also generically of us sons of man, mankind. As another good poet put it, we are

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head."¹

It's a fact—but we will never know that fact at first hand in and among ourselves if some of us (nations, groups, individuals) insist on being rich and consumptive.

And the earth meanwhile is calling, calling to us
in these black skies,
this dirty water,
these pressing crowds,
to tell us that we are separated from her.

Will we turn?

And if so, how? Once the insight into what we have done and are doing to our blue planet hits us, our first impulse is to run and hide somewhere—take to the mountains or the woods, and move back two hundred years or perhaps even twenty thousand in our lifestyle.

But are we the people who lived as recently as two hundred years ago? Even if we try, can we really become like them? And do we want to? Many changes have come about in us in the past century, as a result of this very conquest of nature that makes her no longer fearful and constricting. We are softer—but perhaps we are also more sensitive, more awake to what life has to offer us in our relationships to people and things and ourselves, to the possibility of real communication with the

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse. Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott, London 1965. Poem originally published in 1855.

whole of nature herself. Do we want to lose that, and go back to subsistence living?

Perhaps we can choose to put this very sensitivity and desire for relationship to work. Perhaps we can stand within the state, both good and bad, of what we are, and say to nature, "We were wrong." And perhaps nature will tell us that we must be both firm and patient with ourselves. We do not yet have a clear idea of what the present is asking of us, nor what the future, growing out of the misused past and the misshapen present, will demand of us.

Meanwhile we can begin now, where we are, by being modest. We can own a modest car, keep a modest household, pared-down, self-running on a minimum of power (other than muscle-power), warm in summer, cool in winter. We can rediscover such diverse things as underwear, sweaters, walking, gardening. We can be as local as possible in our buying. All small steps, but all headed in the right direction, and gradually preparing us—and more importantly our children—for the big steps that the future may, and probably will, demand. And as we are modest before her, perhaps nature can show us her fresh face again.

Riches are not only material possessions and freedom from earthbound necessities. Riches are also power:

The power to control the way things and people operate.

The power to create security for ourselves.

The power to manage our own lives and take no thought for the lives of others.

Riches are also stupidity, blinding, fettering, and hampering the person who has them in ways that he cannot even begin to suspect. They make it possible for us to win our way, treading down those who block us, and think of the loser as simply a "loser." They make us say with Marie Antoinette, in our own small, less obvious ways, "They have no bread? Why don't they eat cake, then?"

When we immigrants came here we separated ourselves from the people we found here. We made no attempt to understand their concept of land and property—it's because of our misconception that the "selling" of Manhattan Island for \$24 is such a laugh to us to this day. We proceeded with absolutely clear consciences to a prevailing and suffocating notion that this land is *our* land.

We graciously developed the melting-pot idea, which in effect says, "Become like us and we'll let you live."

But fortunately there were two large central groups who couldn't become like us. The Native Americans didn't even want to try. The Blacks did what they could; they became Protestants—but they couldn't manage the White European part of the adjustment. So we couldn't accept them. We were imprisoned in our own concept, that melting-pot, and could not see that they were (and are) offering us a much more interesting possibility: a smorgasbord, where all the different flavors keep their individual sharpness.

And now they are showing us with all the power and vigor they have, and it is plenty, how we have separated ourselves from the human race in all its richness of diversity.

They are calling, calling to us (believe it or not!)

Will we turn?

And if so how?

A model of how two people from different, even antagonistic cultures can meet across the chasm of differences comes as an unexpected by-product of a Gospels story—the account of the captain in the Roman army occupying Palestine, who sends to ask Jesus for the healing of his servant (Luke 7:1-10).

First of all, neither of them tries to pretend that the chasm does not exist. The centurion has become aware of Jewish culture and the good things it contains; and has made a gesture of friendship to the nation his army dominates; "he built us our synagogue." From this position of power and previous kindness,

he could so easily feel free to demand the services of a fringe prophet within the culture, a man with healing gifts. But no, he sends and asks. And as Jesus approaches, he goes even further. He sends to say, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof"—thus at one move showing both the respect due a prophet and a recognition of the Jewish pollution laws that make of him, conqueror and benefactor though he may be, an outsider and sinner, and therefore an unclean person with whom Jesus as a Jew cannot easily associate. He builds, not a staircase down from his conquering culture to the conquered one, but a bridge on level ground from one to the other.

He stands where he is. He goes on to explain his intuition of Jesus' power strictly by analogy with his own experience—making no attempt to move into Jesus' frame of reference, but holding firmly to his own: "For I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes." And so he comes through to the universal that unites the two separated particulars.

Jesus, for his part, finds in the direct and simple approach of this man (only it is anything but simple—it is the simplicity that lies beyond complexity) so great an opening for his power to heal that he says in wonder, "Not even in Israel have I found such faith."

Recognizing that a chasm exists—

Seeing that it lies in level ground—

Asking, not demanding—

Standing where one is in one's culture and allowing the other person to stand where he is in his—

If we meet like this, we can make it!

And what about people within our own structures, the nation, our religious and social groupings—not the ones we agree with, but those we call 'they'?

If they are 'they' to us, we are also 'they' to them; and in their

eyes they are as right-thinking as we are in our own, and as firm in their stand. They think as we do that there is only one right way to think or be or act. They take their one right way and make of it a weapon to beat us over the head—and we do the same to them.

All our sharp and too-often-hateful divisions of today
are calling,
calling to us
in the wounds
that we receive and give.

Will we turn?

And if so how? Perhaps a first step would be to take to heart a sentence that Oliver Cromwell wrote to one of his administrative groups: "Brethren, I beseech ye in the bowels of Jesus Christ, think it possible ye *may* be mistaken." For a second step we might begin to think it possible that there are other things more important than being right. And for a third, we might ask ourselves if Thoreau did not have a good idea when he said, "It takes two to tell the truth—one to speak, one to hear."

There are two very moving modern instances of the attitude that we are being called toward—an attitude that would make of that hyphen not a razor's edge but a bridge on which we could walk across the chasm of difference.

One is the story of Lyndon Johnson's last public appearance, as reported by Hugh Sidey in *Life Magazine*, in which he closed a rift between two factions in a Civil Rights convention. The most typical statement in the impulsive and deeply concerned speech which he defied his doctor's orders to make was, "Now what I want you to do is go back, all of you counsel together, that soft kind way, just cool and push off wrath, indulge, tolerate, and finally come out with objectives. . . . There's everything right about a group saying, 'Mr. President, we would like for you to set aside an hour to let us talk,' and you don't need

to start off by saying he's terrible, because he doesn't think he's terrible."

The other story—perhaps apocryphal, but true to its subject's sublime disregard of the usual consequences of difference—concerns Pope John XXIII as a Papal Nuncio in Paris after World War II. When people wondered why he was willing to spend so much time with some Communist acquaintances, he replied, "But nothing separates us but our opinions, and what are opinions among friends?"

If we could be like this, all our group differences would serve not to divide us but enrich us, because we would be able to see what we are offering one another, and to know that only out of diversity itself can our wholeness come. We would come to realize that Truth itself, distant, gracious, dimly seen—which we love and try to serve, sometimes in the strangest ways—is large enough so that we can disagree and still remain within its boundaries.

And our children?

It is hard to see them as belonging in this particular category because we feel so strongly that *they* are going away from *us*, and usually for no particular reason that we can see. We took care of them; we gave them the best we had, as parents have done forever; and we keep on breaking our hearts over them and loving them.

They have uprooted themselves from the familiar soil, and are far off, searching for something, a "lost and legendary treasure."

And they are calling,
calling to us
to search for it with them.

Will we turn?

And if so how?

It is nothing new to have the young critical of their elders,

and not even very new to have the criticism come across as sharply as it does today. What may be new is that we are as uprooted as they. As we have cut ourselves off from the earth and from the human race in its diversity, so also we have cut ourselves off from the human seekings of our children, from the human seekings of mankind since its earliest beginnings—from wisdom, and from tradition, which is the wisdom of the group.

There is no need to feel guilty about it. In a sense we didn't do it; it happened to us. The whole process was inevitable, part of our growth, like eating that apple in the Garden of Eden. As has been pointed out by all kinds of weighty thinkers, and some not so weighty—it is a recurrent theme in Science Fiction, for instance—human ways of thought took a sharp turn right with the beginning of the scientific revolution.

The turn was exactly that: right, correct, in accordance with the facts. We needed to sit down before the facts like little children. Anything else at that stage of our knowledge of the world about us would have been false. We needed objectivity, investigation, proof.

But that attitude has taken us *right* away from the wisdom of our long tradition. It has set up a tension between true and false that disqualifies many if not most of our culture's basic points of reference—the story of the Garden of Eden is a prime example—and made us feel that if they were not True (factually true, that is) they were therefore meaningless.

That attitude has cut us off from our oldwives' tales, our folklore, our poetry, our myths: from all that part of our tradition that had, and still has, the power to reach out and touch us where we live. Anyone of our era who teaches adults comes very quickly to realize how literal a generation we are; how limited to a True-False approach; how brainwashed—deep, deep in, where we have little control over our processes—against any possibility of the ancient wisdom ever reaching us directly and truly as it reached our ancestors and gave meaning to their lives.

Much of the work of such psychologists as Jung has been in this area of opening up the ancient wisdom for us again. It has not yet, however, reached the wide cultural environment in which our daily lives are lived; and so the great myths are not accessible to us as in the days when they worked like leaven in whole societies.

But the picture does not show entire devastation. One humble little bit of the ancient wisdom has managed to sneak under our guard and speak to us still in the ancient way, like an arrow to the target of what and where we are. The joke is still with us and, for the most part at least, we still know how to take a joke.

It is sacrilege to describe that beautiful process, but I will. Everyone knows how we take a joke. We don't analyze it item by item; we don't take it factually, or put it through a True-False test; we don't fret our heads over its moral standard or how it matches up with what we already know and think. None of that. We stand there and wait for the whole thing to gather up all its strength into one ball and come bowling at us, exploding like a delightful bomb in our faces with its unexpectedness and aptness. And we have that beautiful reaction of surprise and joy, a laugh.

It is all so direct, so quick, so neat, so economical. That is how wisdom can and should come to us—only we don't know how to let the process happen; and the result is that we have no real idea what wisdom is or what we are missing.

“Wisdom still cries aloud in the streets;
In the market she raises her voice”

(Proverbs 1:20)

—but she has a way of being impervious to the impervious. She will always present a blank meaningfulness to all but the most patient and penetrating scrutiny. Her meaningfulness is like those times when something that has spoken to us (a song, a poem, the memory of a voice speaking in our minds) suddenly falls silent and will not yield up its meaning any more. It is like

seeing a friend on a day when the two of you somehow cannot make your conversation meet and come alive. But wisdom's silence is worse than either of those, in that for most of us nothing has yet been spoken, no meaning has come to us in the first place, and so we do not even know what we are missing.

Is wisdom silent? Or are we deaf? In the Athens Museum, among many statues of Athena, goddess of wisdom, there stands one, strong and beautiful, as one would expect; but bending slightly forward, with a curiously pleading look on her face that makes the whole attitude one of supplication. Supplication from Wisdom! It is unthinkable. But if we are willing to entertain the thought, it ought to sober us.

For we as a people are probably as impervious as any she has ever tried to speak to. Printed words by the thousands blind our eyes daily; spoken words on the radio, the TV, the phone, pound our ears to deafness; and somehow we have come to believe that it is our duty to Keep Up with it all.

What to do? Our children have taken to silence and meditation, and we should too, making ourselves willing to wait quietly for what, for a long time, may seem like nothing.

That, then; plus reading—but reading of a different kind from what we have become used to. No more speed-reading skills; we now need to learn slow-reading ones, which will enable us to pause and think and feel, deep within ourselves where the real changes are made. We need to approach our reading and listening differently, allowing them to feed us: and to find different sources that will speak to us drop by drop in this new life-changing way. Wordsworth coined a magnificent phrase, “the feeling intellect”; it is to this inner quality, when we can call it forth, that Wisdom can speak.

But we are still in the middle of modern error if we expect her to *tell* us things. There is always a Delphic quality in wisdom which demands that the answer acquire its meaning through our response, made from wherever we are. Wisdom speaks in riddles, parables, myths; and what Heinrich Zimmer says of

myths is applicable to the long chain of traditional wisdom of which they are a part:

"They are the everlasting oracles of life. They have to be consulted anew, with every age, each age approaching them with its own variety of ignorance and understanding, its own set of problems and its own inevitable questions. . . . The replies already given, therefore, cannot serve us. The powers have to be consulted—again, again, and again. Our primary task is to learn, not so much what they are said to have said, as how to approach them, evoke fresh speech from them, and understand that speech."²

Wisdom. At one end of the scale the Heavenly Wisdom to which and through which several books of the Bible are written. At the other the long, slow, painful and wonderful human process of coming to know oneself and the world. The two extremes meet and touch one another; and we know some of the heroes of the meeting, many and varied: Socrates, the Buddha, Dante, William Law, John Woolman, William Blake, T. S. Eliot. And at the head Jesus. These are the heroes. But the rest of us, if we are to be human, must become part of the process ourselves, heroes or not.

For a description of what we must do, there is nothing better than a passage from a children's story.

Two toys are talking:

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

² Heinrich Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse*, ed. Joseph Campbell, Bollingen Series XI (Washington, D.C., 1948), p. 4.

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But those things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."³

If we were like this our children would not go away from us. If we were like this the tradition we try to pass on to them would be one that they could accept—strong and firm, but not rigid; creatively rooted in its beginnings and hence capable of growth; simple, but containing great complexity; above all, deep in time, in thought, in feeling. If we were like this our great mythic truths would come back, shyly and tentatively at first, but *there* again at last, and speak freshly to us about the height and breadth and depth of what it means to be human beings together in our world.

And our brothers—our friends and enemies—within the smaller circle of our daily lives? What about our separation from them? Here the razor-edged hyphen cuts more sharply because it is in all the thin-skinned areas, closest to the bone, and we cannot ignore or rationalize our feelings. If there is disagreement or anger or coldness with next-door neighbor, or friend, or someone inside our household, we know it—we feel it—we cannot escape it—we express it in some way in spite of ourselves. The voice that calls to us out of these situations is never muted; and perhaps that is our greatest hope, for it is not merely calling to us, but summoning us with power, and demanding not only that we hear, but that we do something.

But what? How are real clearness and ease and freshness and grace to come again?

³ Margery Williams (Bianchi), *The Velveteen Rabbit* (New York, 1958), p. 17. Quoted with the permission of the publisher, Doubleday & Co., Inc.

We know all the dead-end roads that are available; most of us have chosen each of them at least once. There is the path through a smoldering landscape ready to burst into the destructive blaze of some totally inappropriate action. There is the ice-bound path of the cut-off, the wipe-out, where we either cease to see the other as a person, or stop being persons ourselves, leaving a pair of deadly automatons moving within the situation. There is the allergic path, where we develop such acute sensitivity to all that the other person does and is that we have no recourse but to screen out the relationship entirely.

There is a fourth blind alley, the most deceptive one of all: "forgiveness." Elizabeth Howes makes a keen observation: "I do not think that I forgive. I do not think we forgive. . . . The danger of saying 'I forgive' is great, because it can be extremely inflated. The very statement of it has a terrible danger of arrogance in it."⁴ Who among us has not experienced that deadly kind of noble "forgiveness" that leaves one permanently one-down, in the wrong forever, and seething inwardly?

No—the only way out is through; and reconciliation, seen in this way, is a much darker process than we have supposed. We must learn—and it may take months—how angry and hurt we really are; how mean and spiteful we really are, or would like to be if we dared. If we sit with this day after day, a moment will come when we catch ourselves saying "May his soul rot in Hell!" and suddenly we know why those terrible passages in the Psalms, which we have always high-mindedly eliminated, are there—it's because *we* are there too, in hell ourselves.

At exactly that moment, in hell and knowing it, we feel what Elizabeth Howes calls "a sense of Presence."

"He who planted the ear, does he not hear?

He who formed the eye, does he not see?"

(Psalm 94:9).

⁴ Elizabeth Howes, *Intersection & Beyond*, (San Francisco: Guild for Psychological Studies, 1971), p. 58.

And at last we are ready to leave at the altar our gift, which has turned out to be anger, only that—but at this moment our best, because most honest gift—and go and be reconciled to our brother.

We may find him coming toward us from the altar himself, for such is the nature of these things. But if not, we know where to find him, because we are there too, separated from ourselves as well as from him, and knowing it. We may be able to ask the creative question that will enable him to speak openly to himself and to us of his anger or hurt or fear. We may be able to speak openly of our own anger. Though we seldom move into our feelings enough to be aware of our negativity, statement of the negative is one of the most vital and active parts of the reconciliation process. For when we are free, inwardly and outwardly, to express the negative, that process has already begun; and when we can accept the negative from the other person, it is moving fast.

At that moment (a moment of being, not of time; like that long time when we sat alone, or so we thought) both of us may become aware that the Presence is seeing and hearing, and that forgiveness has visited us, and reconciliation has come about.

But if not—if our brother is not coming to meet us, or standing where we can come up to him face to face—what then? New hurt, new anger comes, and usually we have to re-live some of those bitter Psalm-verses before we are ready to take the new stance required of us; and simply be what we are, and wait, and hope.

And it may even happen that our unreconciled situation, which we long to resolve, makes us reconcilers for others even if not ourselves. It is strange, but true: suddenly, for no obvious reason, we begin to find ourselves called upon to think or speak or act a reconciling part in difficulties of all kinds. It is as if somehow, without having learned anything consciously, we now know how to move along the sharp and cutting hyphen of sep-

aration, doing no damage and receiving none; and perhaps with luck making of the hyphen a bridge.

And ourselves—the self calling to the self across that hyphen: a strange notion perhaps, but true. Nowadays especially it is not merely a call, but a great shout, a desperate cry.

In other times that voice has been much quieter. In our own immediate past, deep preoccupations with the external—the pushing back of the frontier, the development of the new land, the process of mechanization—have silenced the voice by calling upon us to assemble and use relatively simple, efficient selves.

Now, with those needs met and those preoccupations past, we are startled to find that with everything else licked into shape—the shape we thought we wanted, anyhow—we are facing a new frontier, uneasily aware of a new wilderness, and gripped by a new fear. Now we face the frontier, the wilderness, the fear, not of what is outside man, but what is inside him, inside ourselves. We are finding ourselves far more complex than we knew, far more unstable and threatening. “Man is too broad, too broad indeed,” as Dmitri Karamazov says.

We have traded the exterior frontier for an interior one.
And now all the riches of our own human nature,
wild and untamed,
distorted, imprisoned, darkened,
are calling,
calling to us—
to these small, frightened, limited selves
that we insist upon being,
and are convinced that we *are*—
offering us all the fire and life and adventure
that we have cut ourselves off from;
all the fullness of our human nature that God gave us,
frightening and wonderful.

Will we turn?

And if so how?

One of the ironies of our modern freedom from external dangers and pressures has been that it permits us to assemble the kind of self that we like and approve of.

No destructiveness—because we don't have to kill outlaws or slaughter our own meat, or hack down trees. We have social machinery (the police, the stockyards, the lumberyards) for all that.

No grabbiness—because we have “zoned” ourselves away from the people who might dispute our possession of what we have.

No irrationalities—because we have law and order and the broad structures of reason on which our society is based.

No fear—because we can make our lives and persons secure against all but the most wild and irrational assaults.

We can sit in the middle of this network of protections, as gentle as lambs, and feel absolutely great about ourselves and our noble natures. Jung, however, has a warning for us: “Whoever builds up too good a persona has to pay for it in irritability.”⁵ If we look closely we can see that process at work in us, by how easily we are upset and angered by trifles; how defenseless we are against our own irritability; how protective we have to be of these vulnerable “good” selves of ours.

William Law tells us what our situation really is:

“Who has not at one time or another felt a sourness, wrath, selfishness, envy and pride, which he could not tell what to do with or how to bear, rising up in him without his consent, casting a blackness over all his thoughts, and then as suddenly going off again, whether by the cheerfulness of the sun and air, or some agreeable accident, and again at times as suddenly returning upon him? Sufficient indications are these to every man that

⁵ Francis Wickes, *The Inner World of Choice* (Harper & Row, 1963) p. xxi.

there is a dark guest within him, concealed under the cover of flesh and blood, often lulled asleep by worldly lights and amusements, yet such as will, in spite of everything, show itself, which if it has not its proper relief in this life, must be his torment in eternity.”⁶

He goes on to say that this dark fire, this torment, rightly handled, can as well be the foundation of heaven as of hell.

It is exactly this point, in different language, that pastoral counsellors and psychiatrists are trying to get across to us. Our “good” selves, much as we like having them around all the time, are in some sense our enemies. They occupy us like a conquered land, dictating the form that life will take in us, and rigidly controlling all its manifestations. In the political world such action breeds revolution; and so it does in us. At this point our “good” selves must put down the revolution severely—so severely that the whole action and counter-action is unconscious. As Jung points out, its only outward manifestation is that great irritation with others on whom we put our inner revolt.

How did we get into this bind? How did we come to be so imprisoned in “goodness”; and how did we lock ourselves into so limited a concept of what goodness is?

Part of the reason is surely the natural, and engaging, human tendency to latch onto a good thing. And if “goodness” isn’t good, what is? There is also the natural tendency of good things imperceptibly to become travesties of themselves, in the same way that such once-straightforward words as “comforter,” “minister” and “condescend” have become almost the opposite of what they were.

It has been suggested that Jesus was far more tolerant of sin than he was of goodness; and the Gospels bear out that idea. “Why do you call me good?” he once asked indignantly, “No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). And when he meets

⁶ *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration* (1739. Privately printed for G. Moreton, New Forest, Hampshire, Eng., 1892), p. 141.

the “good people” of first-century Palestine, he calls them “hypocrites.” Hypocrites—the word takes on depth when we realize that in the Greek of the Gospels it means “play-actors.”

Here is Jesus’ concern for us; and this is what we have done to ourselves. We have taken the “good” part that we want to play in the world, and made it our whole, a model that we live by and expect everyone else to live by. But it is only our actor’s mask, our *persona*, not at all the whole of us. Meanwhile the rest of our rich and varied nature grimaces behind the mask, or wanders lost, offstage, away from the floodlights and footlights of consciousness. And we are much poorer for it.

Our limited play-actor’s way of looking at ourselves is reflected in the prevailing translation of a famous Gospel passage: “You therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). “Perfect”—the word somehow takes us back to school and performance and the “perfect paper” with no mistakes in it, and to the concept of 100% correct. No mistakes—how human a condition is that? Or even how human an ideal? And yet it is the one that has come to brood censoriously over our attempts to be “good.” What to do?

Perhaps we should take a closer look at the text. The Greek word that is translated as “perfect” is “teleios,” which comes from “telos”—“final end” and means full-grown, complete, mature. Only one translator has taken this plunge. “Now you, you all must be mature, as your spiritual Father is mature,” says Clarence Jordan in his *Cottonpatch Version of Matthew*.

Mature, full-grown, complete! We are in another world, the world of Jesus’ parables of the grain growing until it is ripe, the mustard-seed making a great tree, the yeast working secretly in what is to be a loaf of bread: all of them becoming perfect not by passing a test 100% but by fulfilling their natures and becoming what they are.

What does this mean for human beings?

First of all there is listening—not to what we “ought to” be

feeling and thinking, but to what is actually going on inside us, however little we may like or approve of it.

Then there is containment. We must do as we did with our anger at our brother: become aware of it; speak it forth in the Presence; perhaps share it with a trusted friend or counsellor; but otherwise hold it until this wild, untamed, unknown part of us can come forward and let us know what it is good for. While they were hidden from us, these parts of us were our masters whenever they chose to move within us. Now that we are aware of them they can be, and will become, our servants; and many a bad master makes a good servant.

Then there is discipline, but it is the discipline of the athlete, not the animal-trainer with his whip. It is the patient work of coordination, until that coordination becomes second nature and everything in us works together so well that the thing we are doing seems to do itself.

And there is the process of constantly living with contradiction until it becomes paradox, with polarization until it becomes polarity, with all of our many selves until in some sense they become one.

It is a life work, never done, and all in the Presence. As so often, William Law sums it up:

"For the goodness of a living creature must be its own life; it must arise up in it as its own love or any passion doth; just as the fierceness of the tiger and the meekness of the lamb are the birth of their own life. And if goodness is not our natural birth from our natural parents, we must of all necessity be born again from a principle above nature, or no goodness can be living in us. . . . And from this birth alone it is, that the free genuine works of goodness flow forth with the freedom of the divine life, wherewith the Spirit of God has made us free."⁷

⁷ William Law, *The Way to Divine Knowledge* (1752. Privately printed for G. Moreton, New Forest, Hampshire, Eng., 1892), p. 158.

So let us be reconciled to ourselves in affection, toward life; and to other individuals, other groups, other races, and the earth herself, in the same way.

What is reconciliation when it is done? Experiences are highly individual; and pictures of it in art and literature are rare, and deceptively simple. It is hard to realize when you look at them that anything at all is happening.

There is, for instance, the Giovanni di Paolo painting, *Paradise*; and what is it? Nothing much—simply people meeting. By twos and threes, men and women, men and men, women and women, they are gazing at each other, reaching and touching, embracing. But there is one striking feature: they seem as if they could hardly believe their good fortune—as if they knew they were taking part in a miracle.

Shakespeare, at the end of his life, drew four similar pictures. *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*: no one has ever known what to call those four plays—comedies? romances? softening of the brain? what? They are unlike almost anything else in literature in the note of almost musical resolution on which they end. They take off into another dimension. It is as if the mustard seed of Jesus' parable had grown into a great tree, and all the birds of the air had come to make nests in its branches.

Like the di Paolo picture, however, they are about nothing spectacular: simply meeting. The lost is found, those who are parted meet again. But in the Shakespeare plays the expression on those faces in the di Paolo painting is explained, for these meetings are all after the long grief and pain of separation. And they are full of an unbelievable joy—the joy of meeting again, of reconciliation.

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